



Scrape created on former arable land

# Farming for food and the countryside

Helping farmland birds is one of the three key aims of the Campaign for the Farmed Environment. This is how one award winning NFU member is playing his part.

**P**RODUCTIVE FARMING and looking after the environment go hand in hand at Hall Farm, Knettishall, in the Brecks. Farmer James Bucher runs a commercial operation that includes 100 hectares of carrots and potatoes, 100 hectares of sugar beet and 300 hectares of wheat and barley. The farm also rears ducks for meat and has its own small vineyard.

But James places a high value on the wildlife on the farm as well.

"It is vital that we as farmers implement targeted measures as part of the Campaign for the Farmed Environment, to ensure the resources that we rely upon, such as good soil condition, clean water, farmland birds and other wildlife, are protected for the future," he said.

"It's quite simple: my farmland birds are like a miner's canaries. If they are okay then I am okay. I can't think of a better legacy to leave for my son."

James took over the farm in 2003 and has convinced everyone, including all the



Farmer James Bucher is supporting the Campaign for the Farmed Environment

farm workers, that they must not only manage the options effectively but look out for any nesting birds that may be vulnerable to agricultural operations on the carrots and potatoes.

He has been working with the RSPB to introduce the best options to suit birds and other wildlife on the farm. Staff even have a copy of the RSPB's Farmland Bird Tractor Cab book to help them identify key species.

It's an approach that has seen him named the Eastern England regional winner of the Nature of Farming Award for his contributions and he has now been shortlisted as one of four national finalists.

The RSPB's farmland team is immensely proud of the work and commitment that James has for his farm. His Volunteer and Farmer Alliance volunteer reported that: "This is the best farm and most enjoyable survey ever done."

Emily Field is the RSPB's Volunteer and Farmer Alliance Project Officer and she too is full of praise for James and his hard work.

The farm supports range-restricted farmland bird species such as snipe, lapwing, corn bunting, grey partridge, yellow wagtail and turtle dove.

The farm also has water vole (in the adjacent River Ouse) and otter. James has many cultivated areas for arable plants that have been located on the light land. Flixweed, vipers bugloss and pearlwort are to be found on the holding and these are food plants for many of Brecklands'

## What the Farmland Bird Package involves

The Farmland Bird Package has been developed by partners involved with the Campaign for the Farmed Environment. It can be delivered through Entry Level Stewardship, or by using voluntary measures without environmental stewardship.

The package as a percentage of land in an ELS agreement (and value in terms of points per 100 hectares of agreement land) is as follows:

1. Wild Bird Seed Mixtures on two per cent (900 points) or ELS Over-wintered Stubble on five per cent (600 points), or a combination of the two (eg. one per cent seed mixture and 2.5 per cent stubbles)
2. 20 Skylark Plots in winter cereals per 100 hectares of agreement land (100 points), or a fallow plot\* or extended winter stubble\* on 1 per cent (360 points and 410 points, respectively)
3. 1 per cent of agreement land used to create a network of insect-rich habitats across the farm using one or more of the following options:

- Unfertilised conservation headlands (100 points)
- Unharvested conservation headlands (330 points)
- Uncropped cultivated margins (400 points)
- Undersown spring cereals (200 points)
- Nectar flower mixtures (450 points)
- Low-input cereal and overwintered stubble (195 points)\*

\*New ELS options in the scheme for 2010

unique moths and butterflies, such as the grey carpet.

James entered the Entry Level Stewardship scheme (ELS) as soon as it launched in 2005 and he has ensured it delivers the targets for the Campaign for the Farmed Environment by, for instance, ensuring at least 75 hectares of over wintered stubbles are managed with the ELS part of the agreement, complementing the spring cropping on site.

Arable options make up 18 per cent of the farm, excluding land management such as the area of wet grassland for snipe adjacent to the River Ouse.

James has chosen to have cultivated areas next to maize strips to provide areas for arable plant species and farmland birds, while also helping the small shoot on the farm. James has also taken the area of arable reversion into organic conversion and the area is grazed by a local grazer.

And he has restored many of the farm's ponds by opening them from the

The lapwing is one of the species supported at Hall Farm (Photo RSPB Images)



encroachment of scrub, while still maintaining some beneficial areas of scrub for marsh tit and other bird species.

Simon Tonkin is the RSPB's senior farmland conservation officer in East Anglia and is extremely proud of the work the RSPB conducts with farmers in the region. He said that testament to that is the 45,000ha of land that he has been responsible for submitting into either ELS or HLS since 2007 by working directly with farmers and landowners.

"I can't fault James on the approach he has taken. He clearly has researched the requirements of different species on the farm, and likely to occur on the farm, and combined this with the right management. This is one of the best examples of integrated management and location of options I have seen," he said.

"James is a real example to the agricultural industry. This farm clearly demonstrates how wildlife friendly farming practices can be implemented to the benefit of a wide range of widespread and unique farm wildlife, while integrating the needs of the farm business. These complement one another as well as supporting the Campaign for the Farmed Environment."

The RSPB has helped the Campaign by

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developing the Farmland Bird Package, which has been integrated into the environmental advice available to James and other farmers in the region who engage with the campaign.

Simon said: "We are committed to our involvement in training agronomists, land agents and farm advisers, and providing information to farmers on how to deliver the environmental benefits in the smartest ways."

James will find out later in the year if he has achieved national success in the Nature of Farming Award.

Run by the RSPB, in association with Countryfile, Butterfly Conservation and Plantlife, the awards celebrate farmers managing their land in ways that help birds and wildlife. Votes for James and the other three finalists can be cast online at [www.rspb.org.uk/farmvote](http://www.rspb.org.uk/farmvote) until 27 August.

## Further information

For more information about the RSPB and the Campaign for the Farmed Environment you can contact any of the RSPB's Farmland Team:

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- You can also contact CFE regional coordinator Elizabeth Ranelagh on 01223 874580.